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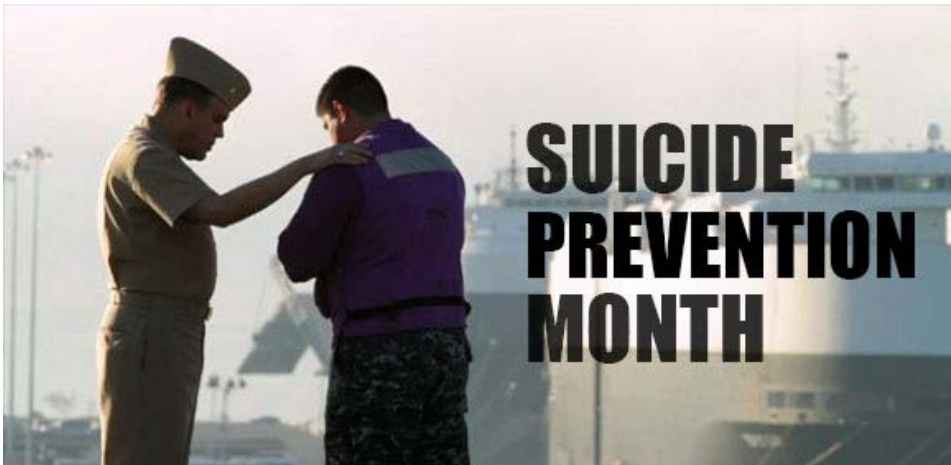
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## Navy Medicine Chaplain Offers Compassion for Suicide Prevention

Filed under [COMMUNITY SUPPORT](#), [FAMILIES](#), [HEATH](#)

(NO COMMENTS)

By **Capt. Roosevelt Brown, chaplain, [U.S. Navy Bureau of Medicine and Surgery](#)**



I remember my first experience of interacting with someone who was suicidal. Even though I was with my pastor, it was a scary occurrence.

I was 23 years old and I was learning to be a chaplain. He had been called by this young man who said that he had taken some pills. We immediately left his office and went to his house. On the way, he explained the situation to me. I was wondering how we are going to handle this situation and what I should say. My heart was racing as I prepared for this moment.

We rang the door bell and his parents answered. As my pastor told them why we were there, they said that he was upstairs and they don't think he's suicidal.

"I want to talk with him," said my concerned pastor.

"No problem," said the parents.

They called him downstairs and my pastor asked him if he had taken some pills and attempted to kill himself. He said yes.

"We don't believe him," said the parents.

Since my pastor had known about the struggles of this 17 year old teenager, he said, "I believe him and I would like to take him to the ER."

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I stood amazed and astonished by the parents’ response.

They said, “Go ahead and take him to the ER. He’s just looking for attention.”

My pastor and I got into the car and rushed him to the ER to get the help he needed.

That incident happened when I was young and inexperienced. Since that time, I have listened to many stories from Sailors and Marines as they talked about their lack of connection, loneliness, and eventually gaining the fearlessness needed to discuss and attempt suicide.

I have learned from my personal research, talking with individuals, and reviewing pages of risk factors that people will commit suicide when they have both the desire to die and the ability to follow through with the act. There are a number of factors that create this dark night of the soul and eventually give them the courage and desperation to take their own lives.

Even though some individuals are suicidal because of mental health disorders, there are a number of them who need someone to hear their story and listen to them. I know that many people feel that others won’t understand them and they are afraid to share their worries and doubts. They often suffer in silence.

Like Job from the Old Testament, they need the opportunity to lament; they need someone to hear their pain and cry for help. The lament can be described as a heart ache with words. The lament often begins with the question why, “Why did this happen to me? Why do I have these thoughts and feelings about death?”

After talking with others, I now know that most of them are not looking for me to answer the why question, but they do want me to listen to them, even though it is painful and scary for me.

Chaplains can provide a relationship and opportunity for desperate individuals to discuss their fears and concerns about suicide. I remember being called by the friend of a Marine to the emergency room (ER) to talk with a reserve Marine about his suicidal thoughts. On my way to the ER even after 30 years from my first experience, I still thought about what to say and my heart was racing.

When I arrived at the ER, the Marine was outside. He was afraid to take the next step of actually going into the ER to tell them about his problems that were leading to suicidal thoughts. After spending with an hour with the Marine outside of the ER, he finally decided that the risks of keeping his problems to himself were greater than talking to medical for help.

The stigma associated with seeking help often prevents Marines and Sailors from going to Chaplains. A recent poll conducted by the Chaplain Corps revealed that about 65% of Sailors and Marines believe that their conversation with a chaplain is not confidential and they are required to report certain matters to the command. It is important for Sailors, Marines and their families to know that chaplains provide a safe place to talk without fear or judgment. Chaplains can also provide a confidential place for members to share their personal crises and thoughts about feelings and suicide. In addition, chaplains serve as advocates to help them find the support and help before the problems escalate and spiral out of control. To learn more about confidentiality and how chaplains can assist military personnel and their family members in times of crisis, please visit this website: [www.chaplain.navy.mil](http://www.chaplain.navy.mil).

*For information on suicide prevention, see the Navy and Marine Corps Public Health Center’s resources [here](#). You can also check out [www.suicide.navy.mil](http://www.suicide.navy.mil) for additional information on suicide prevention.*

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